

Bright

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Scene 1

(The stage is completely dark.)

LILA: There was a young lady named Bright
Who could travel far faster than light;
She set out one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.

(Silence. Lights come up. LILA is lying across an armchair, holding a book. BRIGHT is lying on her back on the floor. More silence.)

BRIGHT: Who wrote that?

LILA: *(Reading the name from the book and sitting up. Her tone says, "Can you believe this name?")* A. H. Reginald Buller.

BRIGHT: Wow. *(Pause.)* Arthur Harrison.

LILA: *(Pause.)* Alexander Henry.

BRIGHT: Maybe.

(LILA continues to read, and BRIGHT starts humming Irving Berlin's "What'll I Do." Suddenly LILA slams the book shut and leans forward.)

LILA: Wait a minute! Don't you think it's a little fucked up that someone

wrote a poem about a “young lady named Bright”? Who else have you ever heard of in the world named Bright?

BRIGHT: Maybe the poem’s about me.

LILA: It was written in 1922.

BRIGHT: Well... it’s about a girl who travels back in time, right? Maybe Arnold and I had an affair.

LILA: Will have an affair.

BRIGHT: Well, from my standpoint I guess it hasn’t happened yet. But from an objective standpoint it happened a long time ago.

LILA: There’s no such thing as an objective standpoint.

BRIGHT: You know what I mean.

LILA: *(Pause.)* If you do go have an affair with him, will you come back here afterwards?

BRIGHT: Will I come back now.

LILA: There is no now. But yes.

BRIGHT: Maybe. It depends on how much I like him.

LILA: Don’t you like me more?

BRIGHT: Of course. I could never be Mrs. Bright Reginald Buller, now that I think of it. It could only be a fling.

(Silence. LILA is very eager to say something, but looks like she’s waiting for permission. BRIGHT is not looking at her, but she can tell.)

BRIGHT: Okay Lila, explain it to me.

LILA: *(Delighted)* Well! It’s like in the poem: the only way for you to get to him is to go faster than light.

BRIGHT: Impossible.

LILA: Sort of. There are ways of cheating.

Scene 2

(As the lights change, LILA exits and WILL enters, carrying the board game Master Mind, a game already in progress. He sits or lies on the floor across from BRIGHT, the shielded pattern facing him. BRIGHT's side of the board has the colored pegs in very neat, methodical rows. They continue playing as they talk.)

BRIGHT: Where in the rules does it say I can't play this way?

WILL: Okay fine, maybe you're not *cheating* exactly. But you're taking all the fun out of the game.

BRIGHT: It's fun for me to get it right in as few steps as possible. This is the way to do it. Keep track, advance one step at a time.

WILL: *(Stops playing)* Well it takes the fun out of it for *me*.

BRIGHT: What are you talking about? This is a game.

WILL: No Bright, this is how you are. You have to get it right. You have to advance one step at a time. This is what's wrong with you. You won, okay? *(He removes the shield.)* You got the pattern, six steps, great job.

(They stare at each other. The phone rings, several times. Neither of them gets up. Finally, BRIGHT goes offstage and the ringing stops. While she's gone, WILL rearranges all the pegs into random order. BRIGHT comes back onstage, holding the phone against her to block the sound.)

BRIGHT: It's someone named Lila.

WILL: Oh right, I forgot. Sean wants the four of us to have dinner this weekend. Us, him, and his girlfriend I mean. Lila. So we can all, y'know, meet each other or whatever. I guess she's calling to finalize the plans.

(WILL takes the phone from BRIGHT and takes it offstage. BRIGHT

walks over to the game board and sees what WILL has done to the pegs. She sits down, takes them out of the board one by one and puts them back into the box. WILL comes back and stands in the doorway. Silence.)

BRIGHT: Do you ever wish you could travel back in time?

WILL: No. Forward maybe.

BRIGHT: You're already traveling forward.

WILL: Well, faster.

BRIGHT: How much faster?

WILL: *(Pause.)* I don't know.

BRIGHT: *(Pause. Quietly)* I wasn't cheating.

WILL: I know.

Scene 3

(Lights change as WILL exits and LILA enters. BRIGHT and LILA resume their positions from the end of Scene 1.)

BRIGHT: *(Seems a bit shaken but composes herself)* Cheating?

LILA: Yeah. Think of it this way. If you and I are both running someplace, and I want to get there faster than you, I could run at a faster speed.

BRIGHT: Of course.

LILA: But I don't have to.

BRIGHT: How?

LILA: I could take a shorter path.

(Offstage a toddler starts crying.)

BRIGHT: Hold on. Sam.

(BRIGHT goes offstage. While she's gone, the toddler gradually stops crying, and LILA speaks softly to herself:)

LILA: There was a young lady named Bright
Who could travel far faster than light;
She set out one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.

(BRIGHT returns.)

LILA: Where was I?

BRIGHT: A shorter path.

LILA: Exactly! And that's what you have to do with light.

BRIGHT: But how could there be a shorter path than the path light takes?

LILA: *(Jumps up excitedly, speaks in an exaggerated voice)* I'm so glad you asked, my dear sir! *(BRIGHT starts laughing.)* This is serious business! Alfonse is waiting! For you! His fair maiden of relativity! He is despondent, he doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep! He's... um... pining!

BRIGHT: He's dead, Lila.

LILA: Ah, but that's just the thing. He's not. He's out there somewhere. The past is out there somewhere. You just have to find it.

Scene 4

(Lights change as BRIGHT and LILA exit and WILL enters. He sits on the chair, watching TV. After a while, BRIGHT enters. She sits on the arm of the chair and holds out a home pregnancy test. She looks at him steadily. He looks at the test, then at her, then pulls her down onto the armchair, kissing

her.)

BRIGHT: So you're happy.

WILL: What do you want to name it?

BRIGHT: Sam.

WILL: *(Laughing)* That was fast.

BRIGHT: It's my favorite name.

WILL: Okay. Sam it is.

(Silence. BRIGHT looks, for lack of a better description, like she's shifting between two levels of consciousness, and not very smoothly.)

BRIGHT: *(Mostly to herself)* This isn't far enough back...

WILL: What?

BRIGHT: Lila?

Scene 5

(Lights change as WILL exits and LILA enters. BRIGHT and LILA resume their positions from the end of Scene 3.)

LILA: Yes?

BRIGHT: What do you mean?

LILA: Well, there's no such thing as a universal, objective present moment. I, for example, could never know exactly what's happening right now anywhere except the exact location where I'm sitting, because nothing can travel instantaneously, not even information. There will always be some delay. So what's really out there, from any one person's point of view, is the past. Look at me right now. You're looking at the past, because the light takes time to reach you.

BRIGHT: But that's not nearly far enough back. What if I want to look at the long ago past?

LILA: Look through a telescope.

BRIGHT: But what if I want to look at the long ago past here in this room?

LILA: Look through a telescope at a mirror, half as many light years into space as the number of years you want to look back.

BRIGHT: There isn't a mirror there.

LILA: But there's nothing in the laws of physics saying they're can't be. It's possible. You *would* see the past if there *were* a mirror there, and that's what's important. Just because you can't see something doesn't mean it's not there. The past *is there*.

BRIGHT: So I need to find that mirror.

Scene 6

(Lights change as LILA exits. BRIGHT stands up, pulls out a pocket mirror and lipstick. She opens the mirror and begins applying the lipstick, when WILL walks up behind her and peers over her shoulder into the mirror, trying to inspect himself. BRIGHT sees him in the mirror, is startled, snaps the mirror closed and turns around to face him.)

WILL: I was using that.

(BRIGHT looks at him, trying to make up her mind. Finally, she hands him the mirror. WILL takes it from her, opens it, and goes back to inspecting himself.)

WILL: Thanks.

(WILL pulls a comb out of his pocket, almost combs his hair, then stops, just like Fonzie in "Happy Days" (see <http://youtube.com/watch?v=>

lMowZNOhj_8.)

WILL: *(As he hands back the mirror)* Who's that?

BRIGHT: *(Pause)* The Fonz.

WILL: One of the greatest moments in television history.

BRIGHT: I don't understand. You carry a comb around with you at all times so that you can recreate a scene from "Happy Days"? Is this what you do all day every day? Go around the city borrowing girls' mirrors and pretending to be Fonzie?

WILL: If I did, I'd be the first person you'd ever met who did that, wouldn't I? That's gotta count for something, right? *(Silence.)* I'm Will.

(Will holds out his hand. Pause. Bright shakes it.)

BRIGHT: Bright.

WILL: I'm sorry?

BRIGHT: Hello Will, my name is Bright. It's very weird to meet you.

WILL: Is that short for something?

BRIGHT: I'm named after a poem.

WILL: What's the poem about?

BRIGHT: Me, I think.

WILL: Oh. *(Silence.)* Well?

(Bright sighs and recites the poem unenthusiastically:)

BRIGHT: There was a young lady named Bright
Who could travel far faster than light;
She set out one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.

WILL: Far out.

BRIGHT: You know, by the time the light reaches the mirror, and then comes back to your eyes, your hair might not be perfect anymore. You're looking at a past version of yourself.

WILL: Ah, but so are you. As long as you're seeing perfect hair I'm happy.

BRIGHT: You're forgetting the poem already. I can go back in time, remember?

WILL: Oh really. And how do you do it?

BRIGHT: It's easy, you just have to take a shorter path than light.

WILL: And how do you do that?

BRIGHT: Well... *(She frowns, trying to remember, and realizes she doesn't know.)*

Scene 7

(Lights change as WILL exits and LILA enters. BRIGHT and LILA resume their positions from the end of Scene 5.)

BRIGHT: You never told me how to take a shorter path than light.

LILA: Oh, right. Well, there are a couple of ways. Do you know what a string is?

BRIGHT: Like in string theory?

LILA: Right.

BRIGHT: Sort of... no.

LILA: Well, there are two kinds. According to the theories I mean. Superstrings are really tiny and supposedly make up everything in the universe.

They have no width, and they form little loops so they have no ends either. Cosmic strings have tiny width but infinite length, and they're very very dense.

BRIGHT: Lila, let me ask you something.

LILA: Yeah?

BRIGHT: What do you think of Fonzie?

LILA: Fonzie? Arthur Fonzarelli?

BRIGHT: Yeah, I mean, was he cool?

LILA: Well he was cool at the time I suppose, but from an objective standpoint he's kind of lame, right? I mean, "heyyyyy."

BRIGHT: I thought there was no objective standpoint.

LILA: Well, my standpoint then. Not very cool.

BRIGHT: No, I suppose not.

LILA: Hey, do you remember the cartoon?

BRIGHT: No.

LILA: It was called like "Fonz and the Gang" or something.

BRIGHT: Oh! "The Fonz and the Happy Days Gang."

LILA: You do remember.

BRIGHT: Now I do, yeah. They traveled back in time.

LILA: Yeah.

Scene 8

(Lights change as LILA exits. BRIGHT is now sitting in the armchair with a bed sheet wrapped around her and the phone in her hands. She dials without looking at it or bringing it to her ear. The phone can faintly be heard ringing and then LILA's voice can be faintly heard coming from the phone: "Hello? . . . Hello??" Finally BRIGHT brings the phone to her ear.)

BRIGHT: This is wrong, I'm even less far back than before.

LILA: What?

BRIGHT: Will left. *(Lila says something.)* I mean he... broke up with me I guess. God, it feels so weird to say that. He can't "break up" with me, he's not my "boyfriend," he's *Will*. We have a goddamn baby for God's sake. *(Lila says something.)* He said he still wants to see Sam as often as possible, and of course he's gonna keep supporting him and everything... *(Lila says something.)* What do you fucking mean that's good?! He's gone, Lila! *(Pause)* Oh. You knew, didn't you? Will told Sean and Sean told you. Jesus Christ, is he there right now?! I can't believe you, Li! *(Lila says something.)* No, do not come over, I don't want you to come over. *(Lila has hung up during the last sentence. Bright sets the phone down.)* Faster maybe.

(LILA enters.)

LILA: How much faster?

BRIGHT: I don't know.

LILA: Why do you have that sheet?

BRIGHT: It smells like him. Or it feels like him or something, I don't know.

(LILA squeezes into the chair next to BRIGHT and puts her arms around her. They sit in silence like that for a while.)

BRIGHT: Tell me how to go back.

Scene 9

(Lights change as BRIGHT and LILA resume their positions from the end of Scene 7.)

LILA: So spacetime has four dimensions, at least. But it's impossible to visualize, so imagine it in two dimensions like a big sheet. Do you have a sheet?

BRIGHT: Hold on.

(BRIGHT gets the sheet from Scene 8, which is still sitting on the armchair, and brings it to LILA.)

LILA: Okay, you hold that end.

(BRIGHT and LILA stand up and each hold an end of the sheet.)

LILA: Now, *(She takes a cushion from the armchair and places it in the middle of the sheet, causing it to sag slightly)* when something is placed on the sheet, it's no longer quite flat, right? The object warps the sheet around it a little bit.

BRIGHT: Okay.

LILA: The cushion warps the sheet into sort of a gentle bowl shape. But if you put a cosmic string on the sheet, because it's so dense and has such a tiny width, it will warp into a cone, with the string in the middle.

BRIGHT: Sam is starting to wake up again.

LILA: I don't hear anything.

BRIGHT: I can tell.

(BRIGHT drops her end of the sheet and goes offstage to put Sam back to sleep. While she's gone, LILA finds some safety pins or something and pins the sheet into the shape indicated by the cosmic strings drawing at the end of this script. This can take as long as it needs to. As she's doing this, BRIGHT can faintly be heard singing "What'll I Do" to Sam offstage. When the song

is over and the sheet is appropriately pinned, BRIGHT returns and stands in the doorway.)

BRIGHT: He looks so much like Will.

LILA: I think he looks like you.

BRIGHT: Will is coming over to see him today. *(Silence.)* I'll be happy to see him. I always am, every stupid time he comes here.

LILA: *(Gently)* Yeah, I know. Do you want me to leave?

BRIGHT: No, stay. *(Pause)* What's with the pins?

LILA: This is what it would look like if there were two cosmic strings next to each other. Pick up your end of the sheet again.

(They each pick up an end of the sheet, without the cushion this time.)

LILA: The first one goes along here, and the second one goes along here, and this *(indicating the pinned together parts)* is where they warp the sheet.

BRIGHT: Who came up with this?

LILA: J. Richard Gott.

BRIGHT: Joseph.

LILA: Julian.

BRIGHT: Maybe.

LILA: So anyway, you want to come visit me over here. You send a light beam straight across, but then you take a curved path, along the side. It's a little bit shorter. *(Pause)* So there you go!

(WILL enters. BRIGHT and LILA are still holding the sheet. He looks at them for a moment. BRIGHT speaks without turning to look at him.)

BRIGHT: I thought you weren't coming until four.

WILL: The meeting got out way earlier than I thought it was going to.

Hi Lila. What the hell are you guys doing?

LILA: Time traveling.

BRIGHT: Backwards.

Scene 10

(Lights change as LILA exits. BRIGHT is lying on top of WILL. They are happy and affectionate with one another throughout the scene.)

WILL: The great thing was that the characters could roam around freely between “Happy Days,” “Mork and Mindy,” “Laverne and Shirley”... like all those shows were part of the same universe. Now every TV show is its own little self-contained thing. They all take themselves too seriously.

BRIGHT: You’re so obsessed with “Happy Days.” You really have quite a crush on Fonzie, don’t you?

WILL: I want to *be* Fonzie. I have a crush on Ritchie.

BRIGHT: Got it.

WILL: Did you have fun last night?

BRIGHT: Yeah, definitely. *(Pause)* Don’t tell them I said this, but I think we’re a much cooler couple than Sean and Lila.

WILL: Well of course we are, Sean and Lila are complete dorks.

BRIGHT: I know, why are we friends with them?

WILL: So we can feel more cool?

BRIGHT: Oh, right.

(Pause.)

WILL: Man I really wish “Happy Days” were on right now.

BRIGHT: Jesus Christ, you cannot keep your mind off that show!

WILL: Oh I just said it to get a rise out of you. I'm perfectly content.

BRIGHT: *(Pause)* Yeah, me too. This is perfect actually. This is the perfect time to go back to.

WILL: What do you mean?

BRIGHT: Nothing, just... I mean if it were the future, and I got to go back in time, this is when I would want to go.

WILL: Yeah, me too.

(They are silent for a while. Their eyes gradually drift closed.)

BRIGHT: *(Opening her eyes)* Are you sleeping?

Scene 11

(Lights change as LILA enters. All three resume their positions from the end of Scene 9.)

WILL: Is he sleeping?

BRIGHT: Yeah.

WILL: Can I wake him up?

BRIGHT: I guess.

(WILL goes offstage toward Sam's room. Silence.)

BRIGHT: How does this help?

LILA: Well if you were traveling at, I dunno, 99.999999 percent of the speed of light, you could arrive first. So when you looked back at where you came from you would see yourself still there. And if the curve was strong enough you could go back around the other string and get back home before you left.

(LILA, having completed her tutorial, starts taking the pins out of the sheet. BRIGHT helps.)

BRIGHT: What about going forward?

LILA: You're already going forward.

BRIGHT: I know, but faster.

LILA: Well that's much, much easier. People already do it even. The faster you move through space, the faster you move through time. So if you go in an airplane, the time it takes you to get from one place to another is a little bit shorter than the time measured by a stationary clock that's not on the plane with you. The difference is just so tiny nobody would ever notice it. But people have measured it with atomic clocks, it does work. And if you could go very fast the difference would be noticeable.

BRIGHT: What about not moving through time at all?

LILA: Just staying in the same spot? I don't think that's possible.

Scene 12

(Lights change as LILA exits and WILL enters. BRIGHT and WILL resume their positions from the end of Scene 10.)

WILL: No, just resting my eyes. Shit, you know what? (He gently extracts himself and sits up.) I'm supposed to be meeting Tad in half an hour. I'd better get ready.

BRIGHT: Wait! Stay.

WILL: What?

BRIGHT: I just... I want you to stay. I want it to stay now.

WILL: Bright sweetie I can't stay here, I've got a meeting. But I'll be back in like three hours at the latest, okay?

BRIGHT: Do you want to play Master Mind?

WILL: Bright, are you listening? I have to go. I promise we'll play when I get home. (*Silence.*) Bright?

BRIGHT: Yeah. I'll see you then.

(*WILL exits. BRIGHT is alone on stage.*)